

DGD22 Draconic Explorers

By Dan Hass



Rumors are that a dragonkin folk hero has returned from an extra-planar expedition that made alliances that can dramatically alleviate the racial tensions in Dimgaard, but something has gone awry. Can heroes discover what has happened to this important figure and help Dimgaard progress towards tolerance? A Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition Adventure for 1-8 12th level characters. An additional chapter of *Encounters with Gold*.

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Adventure Summary

DGD22 Draconic Explorers is a Dungeons and Dragons® 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 12th level characters. It requires a *Player's Handbook*® (PHB), a *Monster Manual*® (MM), a *Volo's Guide to Monsters*® (VGM), a *Xanathar's Guide to Everything*® (XGE), and a *Dungeon Master's Guide*® (DMG). It also uses selections from *Unearthed Arcana* ([here](#)).

While the encounters include scaling for 1-8 characters, parties of 1 or 2 PCs and 7 or 8 PCs are fringe circumstances that may play oddly. Specifically, parties of 1-2 are highly susceptible to a single bad die roll, and 7-8 can slow play dramatically. Ideally a party will be 3-6 PCs.

The Digital copies of the encounter maps are available [here](#).

Campaign Choice

While *DGD22 Draconic Explorers* is designed to fit within almost any setting according to Dimgaard principles (**low prep time, strong themes, smooth presentation, highly scalable**), it was written using the Dimgaard campaign as its primary influence and is indicative of the themes in Dimgaard. It is correlated with the 21-chapter Dimgaard adventure *Encounters with Gold*. The Dimgaard campaign guide can be found at www.dimgaard.com.

Preparing the Adventure

It is always a good idea for the DM to read through an adventure before running it. *DGD22 Draconic Explorers* is no different. There are some rather complex encounters that will benefit if the DM spends a few minutes deciding how she will play them. *DGD22 Draconic Explorers* can be run with a lot of interaction between the PCs and NPCs depending on the inclinations of the players and DM. The module deliberately gives **just enough** information about NPCs to move the plot along, leaving a lot of room for a DM to individualize these to her campaign. In the encounters, the module deliberately gives **just enough** information about NPCs to move the plot along, leaving a lot of room for a DM to individualize these to her campaign, while Appendix 2 has more detailed information about prominent NPCs. It makes things smoother if the DM spends a few minutes deciding how she will deliver the NPCs' interactions. Some DMs revel in the opportunity to assume the

personas of multiple NPCs over the course of a session while others prefer a summary approach. The decision is a matter of style and showmanship. Similarly, many players look forward to opportunities to interact "in character" while others prefer to summarize. Neither approach is "correct"; both are valid ways to collaboratively build a story, but the DM should try to anticipate her players' preferences (and decide her own) and prepare accordingly. To aid in this process Appendix 2 contains entries for the NPCs in this adventure (taken from the DGN series available on www.dmsguild.com).

A battlemat or dungeon tiles may be helpful, but not necessary.

Items for Review

- Creatures. ancient green dragon, aurochs (VGT), black pudding, guard drake (VGT), riding horse, tribal warrior, veteran
- Feats. Alert, Shield Master Spear Master
- Magic Items. *bag of holding*, *bead of force*, *headband of intellect*, *iron bands of Bilarro*, *moon-touched sword*, *portable hole*, *stone of good luck*, *sword of wounding*, *vicious weapon*
- Spells. *enhance ability*, *fireball*, *freedom of movement*, *glyph of warding*, *guidance*, *hold person*, *longstrider*
- Other. fighter (champion)

Dimgaard Philosophy

Dimgaard's primary principle is that D&D should be an entertaining experience. In particular, it should be fun and interesting. The "best" D&D is a collaborative storytelling event where the DM provides the framework and supporting details, while the players contribute by roleplaying the heroes (their characters) that results in epic tales.

"Epic" implies that the heroes be challenged and that success is a question to be decided by the heroes' deeds and choices. *The Lord of the Rings* is only an epic because the reader doesn't know until the final pages if Frodo, Aragorn and the rest will achieve their objectives or die, fruitless, in their efforts.

A great Dimgaard session (and really any D&D session) is where there is the finest line between success and failure and the heroes **just** manage to win (occasionally, just surviving is "winning"). But for those narrowest of victories to have true meaning, they cannot be foregone conclusions, and likely there will be times when the PCs fail – Boromir comes to mind or Gandalf's expedition to Isengard where he was captured.

Running the Adventure

DGD22 Draconic Explorers is made up of six events arranged into three encounters. Some are hazards that can be applied in only a few minutes but encounters with NPCs and other creatures that involve combat or roleplaying will take longer. But since the action occurs in a single adventuring day, it should use a single game session.

Often the PCs' actions determine the type of interaction. A combat encounter may evolve into a roleplaying encounter when mistaken identities, misunderstandings, or action based on false assumptions are corrected, thus ending the violence. Other times conversations, interrogations, or negotiations can become heated and erupt in violence changing a roleplaying encounter into a combat encounter.

Dimgaard adventures gives the DM opportunities to reward good roleplaying. Good roleplaying can garner an easier path to achieving the desired outcomes.

However, it takes stellar roleplaying to completely avoid combat. The world is a dark and violent place where opponents with short tempers often find violence the most direct route to achieving their goals.

The encounters in *DGD22 Draconic Explorers* challenge PCs in different ways. The combat encounters are expected to meet the definition of **hard** (DMG p.81), but additionally there are encounters to test the PCs' ability to deal with diplomatic situations and pose difficult questions about their characters' morals.

Modification "Exploits"

Technically each encounter uses a **medium** XP budget per the encounter building guidelines. And for many parties a **medium** encounter may turn out to meet the definition of **hard** as PCs may be built for roleplaying and the party may not have optimized their tactics.

Modifications have been made to the creatures that do not increase the calculated CR of the creature but do increase the challenge of the creature. These are denoted with a ¹. These are not intended to be used with all parties, nor does a DM need to use every suggested modification. The DM should gauge the effectiveness of the party and decide which of these to use (keeping in mind the definition of **hard** encounters).

Dragon Cabal

In the distant past, Dimgaard was ruled by powerful dragons. However, archfey succeeded in driving these dragons out of Dimgaard to make room for emerging races – particularly the elves. Among these dispossessed dragons was an ancient gold dragon named Rugarth. For thousands of years Rugarth has seethed at the injustice dealt him.

A few decades ago, one of Rugarth's half-dragon progeny convinced Rugarth to begin a campaign to regain his rightful territory. Rugarth began to send agents into Dimgaard and build an organization (the Dragon Cabal) to support his return. The Dragon Cabal is working to convince dragonkin of all types to set aside their differences and unite to restore dragons as the rulers of Dimgaard. In the process, they will subjugate all the non-dragon races (or eliminate those who refuse to submit).

Pholtan Templars

Templars are the hard-core martial class of the followers of Pholtus. Their dedication is so rigid that they cannot compromise Pholtus' message that arcane magic is dangerous and corrupting. Creatures who embrace it must be purified – through torture if time and circumstance permits, but if not, then death will end the danger to others.

When confronted with a counter argument, the Templar's go-to position is that the source of discordance is either corrupt or a heretic. Violence is considered a viable solution to most problems.

Order of Metal

While most chromatic dragonkin are organized into cults, the metallic (usually good) dragonkin have formed an affiliation known as the Order of Metal. It works toward the improvement of everyone's conditions, and in particular has a goal of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between all races.

The Order operates, in some cases, with individual agents tasked with monitoring or helping a specific situation or location. An example is the gold dragonborn Wulxan who operates in and around the city of Odill.

The Order of Metal formed centuries ago, and there is a frustration among younger dragonkin at the lack of progress. Many younger radicals favor more militant action.

Adventure Background

The green dragonborn cleric Legtru was raised in the Verdadis barony. She was an effective agent for the Verdadis family, and was eventually given a special mission.

The Verdadis believed that within the Outer Plane of the Beastlands allies could be found to help them in their struggle to find a safe place for dragonkin in Dimgaard. Unfortunately, there was no method to gain access to the Beastlands.

Several months ago, through her faith in Zivilyn (a patron of wisdom and nature), Legtru was able to gain passage to the Beastlands. The Verdadis were able to communicate with Legtru via *sending*. In the Beastlands, Legtru found many new potential allies, and eventually she arrived at a plan to use *word of recall* to come and go between Dimgaard and the Beastlands.

Legtru befriended a tabaxi priest named Bizarre Owl (Owl) who could also cast *word of recall*. Owl targeted a sanctuary in the Beastlands and Legtru's *word of recall* targeted a forest shrine in Dimgaard.

To prepare for Legtru's return with Owl, the Verdadis sent a contingent to reinforce the shrine. However, the Pholtans had the Verdadis under surveillance for some time and pursued the reinforcements.

There was a celebration for Legtru's return that provided a moment when the defenders were lax. The Pholtans struck. While several Pholtans were killed, the Pholtans prevailed and killed everyone, including Legtru and Owl.

In their weakened state, the Pholtans used *sending* to coordinate a meeting with another Templar force. The Pholtans burned most of the bodies of their opponents but wanted to study Legtru and Owl. The Pholtans are now moving to link up with their allies to take the bodies to a Pholtan site for dissection and examination.

Parties of a Different Level

While the adventure is optimized for a party of 12th level characters, the DM can present the module to PCs of a different level. The DM must calculate **Party Strength** by summing the PCs' levels and then dividing by 12. The encounter and hazard scaling should be based on the Party Strength rather than the actual number of party members.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are informed that an influential dragonborn cleric (Legtru) is missing and likely dead. They are asked to retrieve the remains so she can be *raised*.

Nearing her last location – a shrine to a nature patron – they encounter nature reacting to the desecration of the shrine.

At the shrine, they find information that Pholtans executed the entire contingent for aiding dragonkin and absconded with the body.

On the trail, they encounter Pholtan reinforcements.

Finally, the PCs discover that the Dragon Cabal have taken vengeance on the Pholtans who attacked the shrine and have Legtru's body. They expect to *raise* her so she will join their war effort.

Rests

The PCs are expected to complete 6+ medium or hard combat encounters without taking a long rest. Even short rests should be cautiously allowed since many PCs' resources recharge on a short rest. The PCs begin the adventure having just completed a long rest and they can benefit from only one long rest in a 24-hour period (*PHB* 168).

Once the action starts, the PCs can't take a long rest. If they insist, the Dragon Cabal and the Pholtans fight for the remains of Legtru and Owl, with the Cabal winning. Legtru reluctantly joins the Cabal and dragonkin rally to its banner in response to her decision.

Starting the Adventure

Downtime in Odill

Typically, downtime involves a great deal of individual activity, but in this environment, the DM should emphasize acting together. PCs who insist on venturing out alone may disappear. This can be explicitly related by the staff of the Sanctum of Fharlanghn.

With safety addressed, simply because of its large population, the DM can justify any resource the DM chooses. This can include research opportunities from eccentric sages or in secret libraries. The markets of Odill vary from stable, well-organized, and reputable shopping areas in the high-income district, to black market bazaars.

The amount of downtime available depends on when the DM is presenting *DGD22 Draconic Explorers*. If it is a part of the (related) adventure, the chapters around it will govern downtime.

If the DM is presenting *DGD22 Draconic Explorers* as a stand-alone adventure, the DM should make sure that as a part of downtime, the party has a united backstory with a strong reason to cooperate. Parties with divisions often fail to succeed in Dimgaard adventures, which expect a high degree of collaboration.

The *PHB 187*, *DMG 127*, *XGE 123*, and the *Dimgaard Campaign Guide* all have suggestions for downtime activities and the DM may develop some of her own. There are also several (playtest) options available through the *Unearthed Arcana* ([here](#)).

PCs' Resources

Managing the PCs' access to extraordinary equipment is another tool to modulate the difficulty of the encounters. If PCs are underpowered, downtime can contribute resources (potions, scrolls, etc.) to increase their effectiveness. Stronger parties may not need this type of support.

By 13th level, the party should have an ample stock of *potions of healing* (at least a couple per PC). And *revivify* should be in the party. Also, each should have a useful magic item.

When the downtime is resolved, the DM can facilitate a final discussion among the players by reading or paraphrasing:

The city of Odill is a maelstrom of violence and chaos. In this lawless town, even a hero is vulnerable while alone. There is a safe haven for travelers, though: the sanctum of Fharlanghn. In this inn you have found a group of fellow adventurers to provide strength in numbers. As you begin your day, you share a breakfast in the inn's common room and have a chance to discuss your situation.

With the downtime resolved, the DM can launch the action with the following.

Entering the common room is a well-dressed man with an air of confidence. He has a ruddy skin tone and a strong gait. This is Wulxan, who is well-known and respected throughout Odill. There is a rumor he is the quiet engineer behind many of the city's liberal reforms in recent years.

He takes a seat at your table and begins in hushed tones: "There is a shrine to the patron Zivilyn dedicated to wisdom and nature. It is about a half day's travel to the northeast. I've received a report that yesterday it was attacked. I don't know all the details, and I'm afraid that if there is good to be done, it won't wait for all the information to come out. I need heroes to travel to the shrine and investigate immediately."

Wulxan is further detailed in Appendix 2. Wulxan can deliver the following details.

- Legtru is a folk hero among dragonkin. Although a green dragonborn, she set aside her biases and works for the betterment of all dragonkin. She is greatly respected in all dragonkin communities.

- Those who oppose equality and peace among the races know of Legtru and are hostile to her.

- Legtru had an ambitious plan to explore the Outer Planes for allies to help bring peace, wisdom, and justice to Dimgaard. Reportedly, she managed to reach the Beastlands.

- She returned to a shrine to Zivilyn two days ago to great fanfare. A festival was quietly planned for yesterday. But *sending* spells indicate that Legtru is probably dead.

- She can still be *raised* if the body can be recovered, but immediate action is needed.

- The shrine is about 15 miles from Odill, in a small but dense forest. The journey should be fairly easy.

Encounter 1: Nearing the Shrine

Random Encounters

The DMG p.85 has a section on random encounters. In Dimgaard adventures, the first encounter is often isolated from the storyline, and heavily skewed towards combat. This serves multiple purposes.

The DM can use it to gauge the PCs' combat effectiveness to modulate the subsequent encounters. However, if the encounter goes badly, the PCs can still successfully complete the adventure.

The random encounter also presents the DM with an opportunity to tailor the adventure. She can substitute an encounter she has designed for the particular PCs in her campaign and still complete the storyline of the adventure.

Finally, there may simply be a different encounter that the DM believes would be more interesting to present to the players.

There are Dimgaard Encounter Galleries that may offer alternative encounters that make substitution an easier task.

Map. Path Near Forest

Background. Nature is unleashing a backlash at the desecration of the shrine.

You are near the reported location of the shrine. It has been an uneventful journey. Despite the peaceful appearance of the moist jungle, danger seems to linger.

Running the encounter. The shrine and its attendants are integrated into the weave of the environment. The attack on the shrine has unleashed dangerous forces in retribution. Nature itself has coalesced into a malevolent entity – green pudding.

Incapable of reasoning, the oozes simply lash out.

Scaling the encounter. There is one **Green Pudding** per PC. If there are 6+ PCs add an additional green pudding. One of the oozes has 100 hit points and is CR 5 (1,800 XP).

Green (Black) Pudding. MM 241.

¹**Saving Throws** Wis +0, Cha -3

¹**False Appearance.** Until the ooze moves or takes an action, it is indistinguishable from a damp area of grass.

¹**Grabbing Pseudopod (Recharge 5-6).** A creature hit by an ooze is grappled (Escape DC 13). While grappled by the pseudopod, the creature is restrained.

¹**Mindless.** Spells or effects that rely on understanding or reasoning have no effect on the ooze.

Developments. The violence has also disrupted the normally docile herd animals of the forest.

Stampede! (1,500 XP per PC)

Creature event

Two **urochs** (VGM 207) per PC. Each charges a random PC and then moves on. A PC that cannot be surprised or has a passive Perception of 17+ can quickly act before the herd reaches the PCs. The PC can either move to a safe location (where that PC is immune to any attack), shove a different PC to a safe location, or try to prevent one or more beasts from making an attack at all with a DC 15 ability check – typically Wisdom (Animal Handling) – with each 5+ that the check exceeds 15 waving off an additional beast.

Developments. The sanctuary is relatively intact, but there are signs of both a feast in progress and a battle. In the firepit are the remains of several burned humanoids.

There is a survivor of the massacre hiding in the undergrowth waiting for rescue. He is a human **tribal warrior** named Waya who helped with the shrine.

Waya can relate the details of the attack:

- The sanctuary had little of value, and served the neighboring communities, so it didn't have much by way of defenders.
- Several months ago – before Waya joined the sanctuary – an explorer named Legtru left on a mission. The details were secret. She returned two days ago with a jaguar-man named Owl.
- A group of warriors with no emblems or livery had arrived at the sanctuary to help protect it, but they didn't seem that worried.
- There was a big celebration yesterday.
- About an hour into the feast and dancing, a force of armored men entered. They had a sunburst emblazoned on their breastplates (the holy symbol of Pholtus). They demanded the surrender of the sanctuary for violations of the One True Faith.
- There was several minutes of shouting back and forth. Then a violent battle erupted. While several of the interlopers were killed, all the sanctuary's protectors and attendants were lost in the struggle.
- During the violence, Waya and a group of visitors were seeking treatment for a disease in their village. They hid in the undergrowth. The sunburst warriors burned the bodies of everyone except for Legtru and the jaguar-man. They rested overnight and left this morning with the bodies.
- The visitors left – either to return to their village or seek medical help elsewhere.
- Waya managed to drag one of the dead Verdadis soldiers into the undergrowth so that it wasn't burned.